



State Senator

December 11, 2003

VALDE GARCIA

*Serving the 22<sup>nd</sup> District*

*Shiawassee-Livingston-southern Ingham counties*

## Coffee Break News

### **Extension programs saved from budget cuts**

Thanks to the hard work and leadership by the Senate during the budget compromise, the Ag Experiment Station and Cooperative Extension will continue without any cuts to their funding. In addition, the Senate was able to reach the following budget agreements: the cut to K-12 education has been reduced to less than \$100 per student, the cut to higher education has been reduced to as low as 2 percent, and businesses will have to pay fewer taxes on healthcare for their employees.

### **Senate opens door to greater healthcare coverage for Michigan workers**

Small businesses in Michigan will see relief from one of the state's most onerous tax burdens, opening the door for greater healthcare benefits for working families, thanks to legislation overwhelmingly passed by the Michigan Senate Thursday. Senate Bills 672 and 673 will reduce the taxes paid by employers on healthcare benefits under the state's Single Business Tax by 20 percent in 2005 and an additional 20 percent in 2006. This legislation created the 41<sup>st</sup> and 42<sup>nd</sup> tax cuts in the era of Republican-led tax relief. The Senate has worked to reach a reasonable and responsible compromise with the Governor on addressing the state-budget deficit. This plan to address healthcare concerns of employers and employees was part of that compromise. The \$15 million in savings for 2005 and 2006 can be used by businesses to invest in jobs and employees.

### **Michigan elections to be consolidated**

Legislation passed this week in the Senate will consolidate Michigan elections to four specific dates each year. The four dates are the fourth Tuesday in February and the first Tuesday following the first Monday in May, August and November. A fifth floater date is possible for school districts to hold a millage or bond issue elections if enough petition signatures are obtained. All elections in the state will now be conducted by county, township or municipal clerks which will remove confusion about where a person applies for an absentee ballot or who they contact to register to vote.

### **Senate passes ID theft protection package, Garcia sponsors one of the bills**

The Senate this week overwhelmingly passed a broad effort to stop the explosion of identity theft in Michigan and help victims get their good credit back. In 2002 alone, more than 160,000 people — 4,640 in Michigan — reported having their identity stolen to the Federal Trade Commission. Key parts of the package would prohibit denying or reducing credit to ID theft victims; stop soliciting or extending credit to consumers by mailing unsolicited checks and similar items; give police and prosecutors the power to open criminal investigations and bring cases in the jurisdiction where the victim resides or where the crime was committed; and create a standardized certificate ID theft victims can use to prove their identity has been used for fraudulent purposes so they can restore their credit histories more quickly. Garcia's bill prevents businesses from printing entire credit card numbers on transaction receipts.

### **Traffic signal controllers to be outlawed**

This week the Senate passed legislation outlawing the purchase, possession and use of traffic-signal controllers. The two-bill package makes it illegal for unauthorized persons to sell, purchase and use signal preemption devices. Offenders using the devices resulting in a crash causing death could face felony charges with up to 15 years in prison and a fine of \$25,000. The devices emit a beam to receivers installed at intersections and, when within a 1,500-foot range, change the signal immediately from red to green. The devices are intended for use only by emergency personnel when responding to an accident.

**Billboard legislation will protect Michigan's beauty**

Legislation introduced in the Senate this week would preserve Michigan's beautiful vistas by exploring advertising opportunities for businesses other than billboards. The legislation would not eliminate billboards, but instead find other ways to help businesses advertise. One component of the legislation would add a fifth logo for tourism on state Department of Transportation highway signs. Currently there are logos for food, fuel, lodging and camping. Another part of the legislation would place a moratorium on new billboard permits and require abandoned billboards to be removed. The bills are being considered by the Senate Natural Resources and Environmental Affairs Committee and the Senate Transportation Committee.

**Senate to consider CCW permit reform**

Legislation introduced Tuesday in the Michigan Senate would transfer the authority to issue concealed weapons permits from local county gun boards to the Secretary of State. Under Senate Bill 891, individuals seeking weapons permits would apply at their local Secretary of State office rather than through their county clerk. The legislation and Senate Bill 892, a companion bill, now go before the Senate Judiciary Committee.